

Evaluation Report: A Case Study of School-Community Garden Pilot Projects in San Diego County



Prepared for the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative
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BACKGROUND

Why School –Community Gardens?

There has been an evolving interest in community gardening as a means of providing families and communities with access to fresh, locally grown food while promoting healthy living, environmental awareness, and social connections. School-community gardens bring additional elements to the table by integrating the garden into school curricula, and engaging the community with students, staff and families. Students who participate in school garden programs tend to score higher on academic tests, and eat more fruits and vegetables.^{1,2} Research indicates that cities with community gardens show an increase in surrounding property values and neighborhood safety.^{1,3} In spite of the far-reaching benefits offered by school-community gardens, keeping them thriving can be challenging. Schools often rely on the support of a few garden “champions,” usually parents, to oversee the garden, but when these key volunteers move on, a once thriving garden can go fallow. Neighborhood residents seeking to establish community gardens often face complicated zoning codes and high land costs, insurmountable barriers in even the most supportive communities.

Joint use of school property for school-community gardens is a relatively new concept for school districts in San Diego County. Joint use, also known as shared use, of school sites by community groups and residents for sports and recreation has existed for many years. School gardens (for school use only) are not a new phenomenon in San Diego County; there are over 300 active gardens throughout San Diego County (Mindy Swanson, Joint Use Pilot School Community Gardens Report, March 2012). However, the shared use of gardens on school property by the community is unique, and thus poses new challenges from logistical, economic and policy standpoints.

“Our particular spot had been a dirt lot since 1972 or before. We were fortunate to get that particular property. It is a prominent lot in the community. When we had our launch party, a neighbor came who told us she has lived there for over 50 years. She emigrated to the U.S. from Germany and when she got here she brought a German Oak that she had planted in her yard. She asked us if a group of us would want to dig it up from her yard. She said she wanted to donate it to the community garden. I love that she wants to do that – to have that be part of her legacy.” Kelly Wood, Project Coordinator, Springall Academy/San Carlos United Methodist Church Project.

¹ Carrie Draper & Darcy Freedman (2010): Review and Analysis of the Benefits, Purposes, and Motivations Associated with Community Gardening in the United States, *Journal of Community Practice*, 18:4, 458-492.

² Glen, J.L. Environment-based Education: Creating Higher Performance Schools and Students. The National Environmental Education & Training Foundation, 2000. Available at: http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/16/e4/44

³ Been V, and Voicu I. The Effect of Community Gardens on Neighboring Property Values. New York: New York University, 2006. Available at: http://furmancenter.nyu.edu/publications/documents/Community_Gardens_Paper_Aug3_2006f.pdf

Background of the Healthy Works School and Community Garden Project

In March 2011, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, to fund the Healthy Works project. Healthy Works provided funding to support the School and Community Gardens Program led by the San Diego Childhood Obesity Initiative, a program facilitated by Community Health Improvement Partners and supported through the partnerships of the University of California San Diego and Victory Gardens San Diego (a program of San Diego Roots Sustainable Food Project). The School and Community Gardens Program (SCG) provided funding for project staff (1.25 combined FTE) to support school-community partnerships as an innovative solution for schools interested in developing and sustaining gardens as a means to benefit both students and community residents.

Case study methodology

This case study provides an in-depth examination of the process surrounding the Healthy Works School and Community Gardens Program in San Diego County. Through interviews of project staff, school, and community group leaders, as well as examination of related documents, this report will identify successes, barriers and unique assets of the partners while looking across the partnerships for common themes that may represent lessons learned. The case study seeks to highlight the process of developing and implementing community-school partnerships for school gardens and to identify the systems, values and capacity that need to be in place for a community to partner with a school on a school garden. Finally, the case study compares the barriers raised for shared use of school-community gardens and explores how these may be the same or different than challenges posed by joint use of fields, recreation facilities, or libraries.

PARTNERSHIPS

Pilot Project Partnerships

One of the early components of the SCC project was to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) from nonprofit or government agencies to lead a pilot project to plan a joint use school-community garden. The RFP called for strong community partners and laid out a clear set of deliverables for each site to accomplish in creating a structure for a successful school-community garden partnership. The timeline for these garden projects was July 18, 2011 – February 29, 2012. Grantees were eligible for up to \$15,000 for implementation of the project, up to \$1500 for garden start-up funds (ultimately increased to \$5,000), technical assistance, instructional garden resources, and garden training and leadership development.

Nine proposals were received in response to the RFP. Project selection criteria were developed that included the applicant agency's capacity to lead the project, readiness to implement

immediately, capacity to sustain project beyond the contract turn, community interest in and need for project, support from district and school leadership, understanding of project scope and outcomes, adequate garden site, appropriate budget, and other Healthy Works involvement. Based on these criteria, four pilot sites were funded (see table 1).

Table 1. Pilot Project Descriptions

Pilot Project Partners	School Description	Community Description	Partner Roles	Partner Project Goals
La Mirada Elementary School & Harmonium After School Program	<i>La Mirada Elementary School:</i> grades 4-6, year round calendar, 94% students Hispanic/Latino, 88% free/reduced lunch eligible, 73% English language learners, 99% Spanish primary language at home	<i>San Ysidro, CA:</i> coastal community 15 miles south of San Diego adjacent to the U.S.-Mexico border; residents are predominantly Hispanic/Latino; most of the land, extending eastward is being developed	<i>La Mirada</i> – garden site location, oversee school involvement, engage families, support fundraising, maintain assigned classroom plots, cover cost of water and maintenance of irrigation <i>Harmonium</i> – facilitate meetings through garden coord., training & supplies, engage families, support fundraising, maintain 2 plots, promote to community, run garden club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a sense of community involvement • Develop an organic garden • Establish a garden program for 4th and 5th graders at La Mirada Elementary School • Create a sustainable community garden at La Mirada Elementary School • Track and highlight garden project developments
Springall Academy & San Carlos United Methodist Church (SCUMC)	<i>Springall Academy:</i> K-12 special needs and learning disabled students, year round, leased from San Diego Unified School District, ages 5-22, 63% free/reduced lunch eligible	<i>San Carlos, CA (a community of San Diego):</i> predominantly white, non-Hispanic; primarily single family homes, densely populated, urban	<i>Springall Academy</i> - Provide open space to be developed into a sustainable garden, provide leadership and expertise for developing school garden integration plan. <i>SCUMC</i> - Serve as responsible party and fiscal agent for the community garden project development; provide necessary support to develop a school garden that meets curriculum and safety needs of Springall; ensure that all schools are made aware of the garden project and its intent to serve as a place for learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a seasonal and sustainable community garden at Springall Academy • Create a garden that will complement and enhance the student learning experience • Develop partnerships with the surrounding schools that include curriculum-based garden visits for 2012-13 • Allow the San Carlos Community Garden to be a space for the community to create a garden that encompasses community needs and opportunities.
Montgomery Middle School & Bayside Community Center	<i>Montgomery Middle School:</i> Grades 6 -8; 55% Hispanic/Latino, 17% Indochinese; 36% English-language learners; 100% free/reduced lunch eligible	<i>Linda Vista, CA (a community of San Diego):</i> ethnically mixed community with a large population of Asian/Indochinese; densely populated, urban	<i>Bayside</i> - Develop a garden team, develop goals for shared garden, develop a project implementation plan, design and build a garden intended for school and community use, develop a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a garden team to oversee the establishment of the garden • Develop goals for a shared school-community garden • Develop an implementation plan

Pilot Project Partners	School Description	Community Description	Partner Roles	Partner Project Goals
			sustainability plan <i>Montgomery</i> - Promote broad use of the garden to school and community members, organize professional development day for teachers, meet with school district leadership	for the garden <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and build a garden • Promote broad use for the garden • Develop a sustainability plan
Helix Charter High School & City of La Mesa	<i>Helix Charter High School</i> : grades 9-12; 37% Hispanic/Latino, 27% white, non-Hispanic, 18% African-American; 54% free/reduced lunch eligible	<i>La Mesa, CA</i> : approximately 12 miles east of San Diego; predominantly white, non-Hispanic; greater number of senior citizens than the rest of SD County; suburban	<p><i>City of La Mesa/Community Garden Board</i>: Provide management and maintenance of garden; pay for construction costs and for water usage; secure additional funding.</p> <p><i>Helix Charter High</i>: Provide access to parking; develop and implement a coordinated school integration plan. Note: These roles were delineated in the original draft JUA; however, ultimately the School Board rejected the JUA, and thus these roles were not implemented.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Food • Grow Minds • Grow Community • Promote and Incorporate Earth Friendly Practices

PARTNERSHIP SUCCESSES

Policy outcomes

"It is important to have leadership that is ready to take risks. We had leadership at different levels. Without a community behind this effort, you just have good intentions that won't go anywhere." Jorge Riquelme, Director, Bayside Community Center

One of the primary objectives of the SCG project was to assist in the development and adoption of school district joint-use policies that support school gardens or to encourage that existing joint use policies be interpreted in a manner that would allow shared use gardens. As shown in table 2, policy outcomes were unique to each of the districts involved, and vary widely in their potential for long-term impact. A full discussion of the legal issues raised, and the implications, is covered in the challenges section.

The SCG staff met with the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) personnel to discuss all of the potential issues relating to a school-community garden and discussion ensued over several months in an effort to persuade the District to consider allowing the gardens as an extension of existing joint use policies. Ultimately, a school board resolution was put forth and approved by the SDUSD board in January 2012. The resolution recognized the benefits of the proposed gardens and officially directed the administration to explore the development of joint use gardens at Montgomery Middle School and Springall Academy in coordination with the Healthy Works School Community Garden project. After review by the real estate and legal departments, letters of intent were issued to both Montgomery and Springall, signifying the District's intent to develop licensing agreements to allow the projects to move forward. Currently, a draft licensing agreement is under review by the Montgomery/Bayside partners, and the stated intention of the parties is to have an agreement in place to allow Montgomery's existing garden to undergo further development this summer. At Springall, a letter from the school administration has confirmed that the school is authorized to move forward with its plans under its existing lease with the district, and the partners are considering next steps to document the roles of the partners in developing the garden's next steps. Springall may use the SDUSD license agreement that is being negotiated with Bayside Community Center as a model for an agreement with San Carlos United Methodist Church as the managing community partner for its site. The school district and gardening community hope that these pilot projects will serve as models for future school-community garden projects in SDUSD. This may pave the way for a more inclusive policy change at some point down the road.

They are developing a policy for future gardens, but we are okay to start it now. I am okay with proceeding slowly - to slowly roll it out with community. So right now, no community members can rent; I want to proceed slowly and let the district get on board.

Heather Dierolf, Principal, Springall Academy

The San Ysidro School District took a somewhat similar path by approving a resolution allowing La Mirada to go forward with their garden project. At this time, the resolution is specific to La Mirada elementary school and does not extend to other schools within the district. However, it does potentially set a precedent for other schools to point to should they desire to install a school-community garden.

The fourth site, the City of La Mesa and Helix Charter High School, had a policy outcome that was unexpected. A real property license and use agreement, drafted by Grossmont Union High School District (GUHSD) and the City of La Mesa staff, to allow for the operation of a joint use garden at Helix Charter High School, was approved by the City Council in January 2012. The agreement went to the GUHSD School Board for approval on January 12, 2012. Board member Jim Kelly, citing liability concerns, asked for the agreement to be pulled from the agenda and rescheduled for hearing on January 26, 2012, but the agreement was not heard on that date. Two of the Board members were very supportive of the agreement, and at least one was in favor of tabling the vote for a later date so that Board Member Kelly's concerns could be fully answered. On February 10, 2012, the agreement was heard for a final time. At this meeting the District Superintendent said that he did not support the agreement, and Board Members Kelly and Shield expressed many misgivings about liability for the school district. The agreement was denied with a 3-2 vote, thereby closing the door on a school-community garden at the Helix High School site. However, a backup plan for potentially establishing a garden at an alternate site has provided a path for the project to move forward despite the rejection by the School Board.

Well, we were surprised and disappointed. I am not really sure what happened as our initial conversations with them didn't seem problematic. They were concerned about liability, but I'm not sure if that was the whole picture. These things can happen with elected officials.


Yvonne Garrett, Asst. City Manager/Director
Community Services, City of La Mesa

Garden Outcomes and School-Community Interaction

Significant progress was made at all four sites toward establishing school-community gardens. New gardens were established at La Mirada and Springall, and an existing school garden at Montgomery has benefitted from community work days to revive the garden while renovation plans to accommodate community uses are in planning stages. A school garden will be established at Helix Charter High School, however it will be for the school's use only. The La Mesa garden group is now looking for a new site for the school-community garden, as the site at St. Andrew's church is no longer available due to concerns of on-site pre-school parents. (see table 2).

Perhaps equally important has been the process of developing the school-community partnership and engaging and educating the community about the benefits of a school-community garden. The extent of community involvement varied for each project and seems to be linked to the strength of the partnership between the schools and community partner (i.e. partnered on other projects, strong ties to other community groups), and the partners' interest in bringing the community into the process. Everyone interviewed for this case study expressed that the process of engaging schools and communities to work together takes time and shouldn't be expected to happen overnight.

A history of working together in the community allowed several projects to move forward in spite of obstacles from the school district. The prime example of this is the La Mesa/Helix High project that ended with the school district not approving a garden at the high school site. This could well have been the end of the project; however, because the partners involved with this project very much wanted a school-community garden, they implemented a secondary plan of partnering with St. Andrews Episcopal Church in La Mesa to establish a garden on a one-third acre unused lot on church grounds. While the new plan required the approval of the church congregation, approval by Grossmont Unified High



"I love the design of the grant. It was not a grant to grow a garden; instead, it was a grant to plan a school community garden. The grant was like a raindrop that spread. We now have 70 people on our garden email list."

Heather Dierolf, Principal,
Springall Academy

School District was not necessary. A garden coordinating committee, headed by two landscape architects, drew up a master plan. The St. Andrew's Board officially approved the community garden. At a community meeting, the garden committee shared its goals and objectives for the garden at St. Andrew's and provided an update on Helix's garden. At the meeting, many parents of the children attending the on-site preschool at St. Andrews showed up to express safety concerns about co-locating a community garden at the site of a preschool. The coordinating garden committee is now looking for yet another site for their community garden because of the objections posed to the St. Andrew's location.

Springall and San Carlos United Methodist Church (SCUMC) have worked together previously, and SCUMC has extensive ties to local residents and community groups. Community and business groups who became involved with this group included the Boy Scouts, San Diego Master Gardeners, Rare Fruit Tree Growers, Lowes, and many others. This partnership has made outreach to the community a priority through meetings, surveys, developing garden websites, distributing information to the community about meetings, and creating a Facebook page. In recognition of their efforts, Springall Academy received a proclamation from the County Board of Supervisors commending Springall and the community of San Carlos for bringing this school-community garden to San Carlos. The proclamation officially recognized March 25, 2012 as "San Carlos Community Garden Day." General community access to the school site is still awaiting formal

agreements. While the School District has issued a formal letter acknowledging that Springall may proceed with the garden, it is likely that this partnership will await the resolution of the District's negotiations with Bayside about a licensing agreement there. It is expected that Springall will use the SDUSD licensing agreement with Bayside as a model for an agreement between Springall and SCUMC.

The involvement of the local church as the project partner with Springall was unique out of the four pilot projects, and the potential strength of the involvement of local faith communities may be well illustrated by this project. According to Kelly Wood, project coordinator for the Springall/SCUMC garden project, *"I strongly believe in bringing in faith based organizations to do this work. That's what they do – bring people together!"* Ms. Wood also was anxious to note that at least two other congregations have become involved in the garden and she sees this project as a unique opportunity for collaboration among faith communities.

The Montgomery/Bayside project also benefited greatly from their partnership, especially when issues with the school district's policies held things up. The Montgomery garden had been previously established in 2003, and was actively used at the school, but there was a strong feeling that the school garden could really benefit from participation by the community. In March 2011, with the advent of the SCG grant, the project coordinator (Janice Pezzoli) began recruiting the community to determine interest in getting involved with the school garden at Montgomery. There was a lot of community interest; however, the discussions with the school district took many months, and according to Janice Pezzoli, *"The process took too long for the community. They just wanted to garden. We kind of lost the community members over to Bayside (the community garden project developed there). But the community still wants to participate at Montgomery."* Without the partnership, the school-community garden could have died as the community interest waned when district approval was not immediately forthcoming. Through the combined efforts of dedicated school champions (Emalyn Leppard, 2010 Teacher of the Year, and Principal Jonathan Ton), and dedicated community partners at Bayside, the garden project is moving forward with ideas to engage the community in the school garden through grant writing, curriculum development and outreach. The community garden that was developed at Bayside Community Center in July 2011 has served to anchor and further develop support for the school-community garden at Montgomery. Community demand has grown and there is a demand for more space, which Montgomery will be able to offer.

Be patient. Give your people (community) enough to keep them going. If people thought we were going too slow, they left the process. But we have to go slow. People are ready with shovels and plants. But if we didn't do it the right way, it would not grow and support our stakeholders in the long run.

Heather Dierolf, Principal, Springall Academy

At this time, La Mirada/Harmonium has limited their community involvement to groups that are already established school partners. This was per the request of the school principal who felt that without a garden/project coordinator to oversee the effort, monitoring of the site would fall to him and be more work than was possible to handle. The principal is open to allowing greater access in the future, and the garden has two access points – one from school grounds and one from an alley. Additionally, the interior gate has a padlock on the school side so access to the school from the garden is controlled. Although the partners in this project have not reached out to the San Ysidro community as a whole, several community partners remain involved with the school garden because of their prior relationships with the school. Plots are assigned to district associated organizations that have a routine weekly and/or monthly plan of participating in the garden. Navy members of the ship Comstock have volunteered extensively with both establishing the garden and maintaining it. A local parenting project, Even Start, has included working in the garden as part of their curriculum, and work in the garden on a regular basis. There is still work to be done; however, as Patty Callera (garden project manager) explains *“To say the San Ysidro greater community was invited in, no, that didn’t happen. This kept it from growing. It will be slow, bringing the community in, but it will happen.”*

Montgomery Middle School Garden Work Day



Table 2. Policy and Garden Outcomes

Pilot Project	Garden Outcomes	Policy Outcomes	Plans for Sustainability	School Integration Plans
La Mirada Elementary School & Harmonium After School Program	Garden established on school site with 13 raised beds, orchard and composting	San Ysidro School District (SYSD) ratified the La Mirada Healthy Works School and Community Gardens Intervention on 8/11/11 for the 2011-2012 school year. This allowed SYSD and La Mirada Elementary to proceed with the development of a joint use garden in partnership with Healthy Works and Harmonium, Inc. at La Mirada Elementary. A MOA was signed by Harmonium and San Ysidro School District on 3/15/12 stating their intent to continue to partner on the garden for the next 3 years. This sets the precedent for an actual joint use agreement between Harmonium and San Ysidro in the future.	3 yr. sustainability plan includes steering committee, fundraising activities, school integration plan, annual maintenance and event schedule. The MOA also states intent of Harmonium to hire a garden coordinator while SYSD will remain the fiscal agent and pay for the garden's water. Both parties plan to support the agreement entered into during the planning phase of the garden.	Recruit teachers to use the curricula "Nutrition to Grow On;" establish an after-school garden club; outreach to the community to volunteer in the garden; food and nutrition services plan to grow herbs and incorporate them into the school meal program
Springall Academy & San Carlos United Methodist Church (SCUMC)	160 x 120 sq.ft. plot on school grounds; planted 23 fruit trees	San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) approved a board resolution to explore community gardens on school property. A letter of intent was issued by the District and Springall has now been advised that its existing lease permits the garden. Procedures are being developed at the District and the District is recommending that Springall enter into an agreement with SCUMC similar to the one it drafted for the Bayside-Montgomery partnership.	Garden leadership includes planning, design, and construction committee; communications committee; resource development committee, and education/school outreach committee. Each committee has a chair, overarching garden coordinator and representatives from SCUMC and Springall. Participated in a sustainability planning workshop. The sustainability plan lays out next steps for program implementation and fundraising.	Use the space therapeutically for student counseling; conduct nutrition lessons including taste testing in the garden; Teach science, including environmental science lessons; create a job training program; use for culinary arts/cafeteria
Montgomery Middle School & Bayside Community Center	A preexisting garden was located at Montgomery and plans are underway for	San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) approved a board resolution to explore community gardens on school property. This provides official direction to explore	Established the Linda Vista Neighborhood Food Gardens group (www.lvgardens.org) Fundraising / grantwriting is	Establish Garden Committee/Coordinator(s), schedule garden time, review Basic Gardening Ideas, consider community resources that can be

Pilot Project	Garden Outcomes	Policy Outcomes	Plans for Sustainability	School Integration Plans
	modifications to accommodate community and increase learning environment. A new community garden was built in July 2011 at Bayside (other funds) and this is helping to build community interest	the development of joint use gardens in coordination with the Healthy Works School Community Garden Resolution. Currently, SDUSD has determined to proceed with pilots and has provided a draft licensing agreement that is under review and negotiation with the project partners.	underway to support ongoing coordinator position, Participated in a strategic planning workshop.. Partners have decided on their program vision, mission, goals, and are currently refining their program goals. The strategic plan will set the tone for all future activities in the garden and grant applications.	accessed for support, Model Using the Outdoor Classroom and provide mentorship, Continue to provide garden internships to support teachers interested in using the garden for instructional purposes Consider starting a garden club for at least one 8-week session a year, provide list of support for activities in the garden, apply together and coordinate grants and publicity.
Helix High School & City of La Mesa	School garden to be established at Helix Charter High School. Garden Committee is still seeking an appropriate school-community garden site.	This project underwent significant changes. The real property license and use agreement drafted by GUHSD and City staff to allow for the operation of a joint use garden at Helix Charter High School was approved by the City Council on January 10, 2012. The agreement went to the GUHSD Board on January 12, 2012. Board member Jim Kelly, citing liability concerns, pulled the agreement from the agenda and rescheduled to be heard on January 26, 2012. On February 10, 2012, the agreement was heard for a final time, and denied approval from the Board with a 3 to 5 vote. The City of La Mesa -Helix Charter High School Community Garden Project implemented a secondary plan to put a garden on the campus of Saint Andrews Episcopal Church. The garden was approved by the Church, but later rejected by the parents of the on-site preschool due to student safety concerns.	Elected board to oversee garden management. Participated in a sustainability plan workshop. Plan drafted and acts as guide for the future development of a community garden and the school garden at Helix Charter High School.	A school integration plan was developed for Helix High School. However, with the relocation of the community garden to St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, the school integration plan will need to be adapted to accommodate for the lack of community support in a change of the garden's structure.

Educational benefits

All of the sites have developed school integration plans, although not all sites actually implemented elements of these plans during this school year (See table 2 for school integration plans). All sites had at least one representative that attended the Healthy Works/VGSD Regional Garden Education Center courses, including Gardening 301: How to Start and Sustain a School Gardening Program, which includes information on school and afterschool integration.

Montgomery seems to be the furthest along with incorporating teachers, students and classroom curricula into the garden. According to Janice Pezzoli, social studies, math and English classes have already begun utilizing the garden in their classroom studies, and the school plans to work with their special education students as well. Montgomery had a professional development day for teachers, and has seven interns from USD, UCSD and Cuyamaca College working in the garden. Springall Academy teachers were recently trained previously with a garden education curriculum through Victory Gardens, and they plan to continue using this curriculum with the students. Springall Academy serves all special needs students, and Principal Dierolf expressed that *“gardens are really helpful for special needs students; they benefit from having a variety of ways of learning. Eventually, I hope every student is out there at least once a day.”* La Mirada intends to train teachers with the curriculum “Nutrition to Grow On.”

Sustainability

All of the sites have written a sustainability plan (see table 2) , and all sites with the exception of La Mirada opted to participate in a strategic or sustainability planning process. In addition to the strengthening of partnerships discussed earlier, specific elements in place that will promote sustainability include:

- The La Mesa Community Garden team has elected a board to oversee garden management at St. Andrew's, the non-school site selected following the school board's rejection of Helix High joint use garden. Since that site has also been ruled out, presumably the board will continue to pursue another location. The City of La Mesa will continue to support the project by identifying funding opportunities and continuing to provide guidance. The City of La Mesa has a track record of supporting projects that promote healthy living, and will stay invested in the project.
- Springall Academy/ SCUMC plans to continue their partnership and build out their current site according to their landscape architect designed plan. The garden team has elected leadership, identified funding opportunities to sustain the garden, and arranged training for teachers to incorporate the garden in lesson plans. Their garden website: www.sancarloscommunitygarden.org
- Montgomery Middle School will continue to work with Bayside Community Center to attract school related families to engage in garden work at the school. Teachers will work on school integration activities using community partnerships. During the summer of 2012, the team is planning to redevelop the existing school garden to accommodate community use. Their garden website: www.lvgardens.org.

- La Mirada/Harmonium are continuing their efforts to bring in community and financial support through outreach to community businesses (e.g. Home Depot, Starbucks) for financial and in-kind support of the garden.

PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGES

Internal partnership challenges

Partnerships that bring together two distinct groups with different missions and constituents require a significant amount of time devoted to defining roles and establishing goals that meet the needs of both partner groups. Partners need to be in sync with the goals of the partnership, with the community partner truly being committed to implementing and operating a community garden, and the school partner being committed to bridging the divide between the school and the community. For projects that had a prior relationship (Helix Charter/City of La Mesa, Montgomery/Bayside), partners had a preexisting foundation of trust, and a reasonably good idea about how to work together. Developing and building trust between partners takes time, and is crucial to moving any project forward. Kelly Wood, project coordinator with the Springall/SCUMC project stated that *“respecting and learning to deal with so many opinions and personalities was a challenge – finding the happy medium.”* Additionally, because of the focus on policy change, there was a perception that sometimes partners stopped working on building the partnership while they waited to figure out what was happening with policy. This caused a perceived loss of momentum, and some projects may not have gotten as far as they would have liked because of this.

There's a lot of learning that can come from partnerships, but there wasn't time for that. Partnerships, relationships take time. If you add lawyers to the mix it takes a lot more time. Then you lose momentum. Gardeners want to garden, they don't necessarily want to change policy.
Mindy Swanson, Healthy Works School-Community Garden project

Specific to the La Mirada/Harmonium project, the community partner believed they came on as a “last resort” to partner with La Mirada, only after all other possible partnership options had been rejected. According to Patty Callera, garden coordinator, *“Harmonium came on board as a last resort, and that was not a positive thing. It would have been nice if they came on board because they were gung-ho, really interested. They tried to do their best, but they gave 80%, not 100%. It may have been unrealistic to think they would take it on the whole way.”*

The ability to build on momentum was identified as critical to successfully engaging and sustaining both school and community members. Community engagement was seen as key to keeping the ball rolling, and in particular keeping pressure on school boards to open up the schools to the community. Some partners expressed that the time consuming policy efforts stymied the momentum of community interest, causing potential community members to lose

interest. It was challenging for projects to balance policy work with keeping the community engaged and interested. At Montgomery/Bayside, when school district issues began to mount and prospects for opening the school garden faded, community members left the table. The extremely short timeline required for Healthy Works, combined with policy deliverables that perhaps were more long-term, was challenging to the partnerships and impacted all aspects of implementation. As described by Mindy Swanson, *"Something has to happen, even if it's small. It's important to remember that the community interest is primarily in gardening and engaging with the school, not policy change."*

La Mirada/Harmonium Garden Build Day



Legal Issues.

Legal authority to contract with non-profit agencies. For the two schools located on San Diego Unified School District property, an initial issue emerged when the District took the position that it could not enter into a shared use arrangement with a non-profit entity. The District cited California Education Code Section 10910 of the Community Recreation Act, a law that authorizes school districts to establish community recreation programs. The law provides explicit authority for districts to grant the use of any building, grounds, or equipment to any other public authority for community recreation purposes. This was interpreted by SDUSD's legal department as restricting the District's authority to contract with any entity other than a governmental agency. Healthy Works staff, in turn, contacted a local City Councilmember's office to explore the possibility of the City acting as the contracting party as a means around this objection. A hearing before the City's Land Use and Housing Committee was scheduled, and Healthy Works staff presented the school community gardens project to the Committee. Although the project was favorably received, the proposed addition of the City as an additional party appeared unnecessary when word came in February 2012 that the District was willing to move forward to contract directly with Bayside Community Center for the Montgomery Middle School site and to allow Springall to move forward on its plan to develop its garden with San Carlos United Methodist Church.

Ability to collect fees / allocate plots to community members. SDUSD raised concerns that the availability of a limited number of plots to be allocated to community members might be construed as a "gift of public funds." The District also raised concerns about whether it was appropriate to collect fees for community plots. Public Health Law and Policy (PHLP), of Oakland, California and its team of lawyers offered analysis of these issues based on previous experience in dealing with joint use issues in other California school districts. They noted that public gift was not a true concern because the use of public funds for a public benefit, good or purpose does not constitute a gift. They suggested that a clear process could be established for providing access to plots, as with a lottery, first come – first served, or other standardized process in order to eliminate any concerns of bias in the selection of community members. PHLP also noted that schools, like cities, may charge fees to recover costs associated with programs, such as this, and suggested that fees be based on reasonable costs such as water, liability, garden materials, and maintenance. While it is not known how the District resolved these concerns internally, it does appear that they are prepared to move forward with shared use agreements, subject to certain conditions and procedures.

Liability. For Helix Charter High School's garden, liability was the deal-breaker pointed to by the Grossmont Union High School Board in declining to enter into a shared use agreement with the City of La Mesa. The Board's negative decision came as a surprise to project participants because there had been cooperative discussions between District representatives, the City of La Mesa,

garden committee members, and Healthy Works staff in the months leading to the Board's ultimate decision. A detailed shared use agreement had been drawn, negotiated, and approved by the City of La Mesa in January 2012. The agreement addressed liability and explicitly provided that the City or its sublicensee (the garden committee) would purchase insurance and name the District and the City as additional insureds. An indemnification agreement provided additional assurance that the City would be responsible to the District for claims alleging negligence on the part of the City and further obligated the City to insure that any sublicensee provided a similar indemnification agreement to the school district. Ultimately, however, the Chair of the School Board insisted that the District was exposing itself to excessive liability, and he succeeded in persuading two other Board members of his concerns, sending the proposal to defeat on a 3-2 vote.

For the San Diego Unified School District, liability has been a stated concern, also. Negotiations are ongoing at this writing, however, and the purchase of insurance by the community organizations involved appears to be an acceptable means of dealing with the risks of injury and loss. Mutual indemnification agreements are expected to be acceptable to the parties. San Carlos United Methodist Church has already explored the availability of insurance and agreed to underwrite the cost for at least an initial couple of years. For the church, purchase of insurance is a logical means of addressing these concerns. As Kelly Wood, project coordinator, stated *"The way we looked at it, we were already getting insurance for special events like the July 4th picnic. We decided this was no different."* Bayview Community Center is also exploring adding the school community garden to its existing liability policy. At this writing, the matter still under discussion concerns the limits of liability insisted upon by the District with the current request being 3,000,000 per incident / 5,000,000 aggregate, an amount believed to be considerably in excess of insurance limits ordinarily required.

The shared use agreement(s) under discussion with the District are also expected to articulate responsibilities for specific dangers and consequent liability. For instance, the Agreement provides specific responsibility for securing tools and gardening supplies and a specific procedure is being outlined for dealing with application of pesticides to the garden and posting of appropriate notices.

The draft agreement also alludes to concerns about the ownership of produce that is harvested and possible food safety concerns, providing in its initial shared use agreement draft that produce may not be used or disposed of except as provided in a separately negotiated agreement to be developed and attached.

The protection of students and school property is an issue of concern to all parties, quite apart from the liability implications of the potential for harm to children. This is being dealt with in a variety of ways. One theme that has developed across the projects in response to this challenge is the concept of a progressive, "go slow" approach to integrating the community into the school gardens.

- At Montgomery/Bayside, community access will be limited to after-school and school vacation times. “Community” members with access will initially be limited to parents and family members of students attending the school.
- At La Mirada/Harmonium garden access is limited to school or school district staff, school students, and “district associated” organizations that have had a prior relationship with the school.
- At both sites on SDUSD property, volunteers working on the community will be subject to the same screening procedures that are in place for volunteers working at the schools.
- At both SDUSD sites the parties must commit to return the property to its condition existing at the beginning of the agreement at the expiration of the lease. Springall’s Principal is unchallenged by this District requirement, expecting to continue to occupy the school for additional renewals and doubting that a plowed under dirt lot will really be insisted upon over the improvements in process.
- Property is fenced off from the main school area at La Mirada and Montgomery. At Springall, there is no existing fence, but one is planned and a commitment to donate these materials has been secured.

Negotiating the roles of partners / costs of maintenance. Many of the challenges of dividing roles and responsibilities have been discussed in the context of liability.

Cost of water. Water costs continue to escalate in the San Diego area, and negotiating these costs can be a significant issue. In the proposed agreement between Bayside and SDUSD, the District provides that it “may” require Bayside to reimburse the District associated with community use and in order to do this it may require Bayside to install a submeter. The agreement also authorizes Bayside to collect garden plot fees and to escrow the water portion of those fees, additionally providing that those fees could be used for school garden programming. For the La Mirada project, water costs are currently being covered by San Ysidro School District. Springall Academy has agreed to cover water cost for the site

Staffing – garden coordination. A garden coordinator was designated for each project during the course of the Healthy Works grant and with the completion of the grant, each of the projects has expressed the need to continue to have someone serve that role. At Montgomery/Bayview, Janice Pezzoli is volunteering while Bayview is seeking grants to support two part-time coordinators – one to serve at Bayside, which now has its own community garden and one to serve at the school. At Springall/SCUMC, there are five active Committees dedicated to the garden’s continued development and operation, and they have representation from both the school and the community. For now, they are operating completely on a volunteer basis. School staff members have been successfully engaged, having taken a professional development program, and they organized a community kick-off event in early April. One person has been selected to coordinate external requests for information. There is currently no garden coordinator at La Mirada/Harmonium although a number of potential fundraising plans are in the works that would support

some kind of dedicated staff. There is potential for those currently involved in the garden project to coordinate activities quarterly and rotate leadership among garden team members.

A school garden coordinator is needed at the District level for SDUSD. Currently, the Farm to School Coordinator has been tasked with developing a manual / procedures to govern the new pilot projects under development at Montgomery/Bayside and Springall/SCUMC. There is hope that the pilots will provide a model for other schools and community groups in the District and the logistics of organizing and supporting school community gardens will be best served with a dedicated staff member.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some common themes developed in looking across the four San Diego County projects, and the lessons from these communities may prove helpful to others seeking to develop school community gardens.

- ***Community engagement is absolutely necessary.*** Building broad interest in school-community gardens takes time. It is important to introduce the concept to those most likely to be impacted by the joint use garden, and address their immediate concerns. Parents, as part of the school community and the community at large, may be fearful that allowing community access to the schools will jeopardize student safety. School staff may be concerned about vandalism. Community members might not see the value of having the community make a closer connection to the school. Identifying and addressing these concerns of all members of the community allows the partnership to strengthen and build the necessary support. Passionate and committed leaders from within the community can educate and advocate to allay fears.

“Learning the ropes” of developing a community garden requires some dedicated effort, and identifying interested community members to help in the effort and getting the word to them is not a one shot deal. At Springall/SCUMC, the grant coordinator made a concentrated effort to grow attendance, creating a website, using social media, and cultivating connections with related garden projects in the County. Attendance at garden committee meetings grew steadily with each meeting, and this broad participation has proven powerful. There are five active committees, an email list with over 70 people on it, a professional landscape architect plan (donated) and commitments from community members and local businesses to donate and support nearly every part of the planned garden. This broad support may contribute to sustained interest and support for the garden, even as individual community member support cycles in and out. Creating realistic timelines to allow this is important.

"We needed to do our due diligence. We wanted to have the most people possible involved. We wanted to get all of the ideas about what the garden should be. We could have done it ourselves (four of us on the leadership team), but if we did that, what would have happened?" Kelly Wood, Project Coordinator, Springall/SCUMC

At one location (Montgomery/Bayside) a school garden was already in place, and had been a part of the school for years. But a highly motivated teacher recognized that the support of the community could make the garden sustainable by providing outside help and resources. *"The community is really a necessary component. Whenever I go there, it is in shambles. We need people from the community there turning over the weeds. You don't realize until you do it – this is not sustainable without help. We want to make this a beautiful learning environment – this is what the community offers – they have a lot of knowledge."* Janice Pezzoli, Garden Coordinator, Bayside Community Center.

Because the broader goals of policy and systems change are not likely to be the main interest of community members, it may be helpful to maintain the interest of the community through creating "small wins." This also helps build on the momentum that is being built around the idea of school-community gardens, and allows for recognition of the work already accomplished. Events like the recent community kickoff event for the Springall/SCUMC garden help sustain interest, show off garden progress, and generate additional interest.

- ***Developing political will and support is critical.*** Resistance to change, particularly in the face of the intense economic pressures facing schools and communities, can be powerful. This may be particularly true for a new model like the school-community gardens envisioned by these projects, given the lack of local experience. The benefit of building political will is closely related to the building of community support, and this is illustrated by the process leading to securing school board approval to advance the projects at San Diego Unified School District. After a number of months of meetings with the District's legal department and school administration to overcome legal concerns, the proponents got the issue on the School Board agenda.

"We got people there – they were passionate, focused. Each board member took it upon themselves to listen and understand. They were supportive and the decision was made to have this looked into." Jorge Riquelme, Director, Bayside Community Center.

The role of Julianna Arnett in coordinating the parties and navigating the policymaking process was acknowledged and recognized by every partner we interviewed.

"She came with a framework. She knew how to respond to community. Her commitment, her determination, and her patience to talk to the various stakeholders was so valuable. She really listened and did not treat this like a generic environment. She even talked to elected officials." Jorge Riquelme, Director, Bayside Community Center.

- ***Joint use of school gardens with communities presents unique challenges compared to other types of joint recreational uses, but the benefits and current climate favor the investment of time, resources and effort.***

Having a non-profit community organization lead a partnership to develop a school-community garden has not been done locally but with carefully negotiated shared use agreements and appropriate insurance in place, the concerns of both parties can be addressed. The differences between a school-community garden agreement and agreements opening ball fields and other recreational facilities to community use include:

- Water use
- Unique equipment including irrigation, tools, fertilizer and storage facilities
- Pesticide use
- Continuous maintenance responsibilities

While the types of injury and liability may be different, the concept of negotiating and allocating responsibility remains the same. The case could even be made that the activities occurring on ball fields and other recreational uses are associated with greater risks and exposure to claims.

On the other hand, the potential benefits are many. There may be economic advantages to sharing garden responsibilities. Broadening the school reach to include community support may serve to sustain school gardens that previously could only be tended during the school day by teachers with the time and interest to devote. Community involvement provides the potential to sustain a school garden over school vacations. Health benefits to school and community members include the availability of fresh produce, a source of physical activity, and the opportunity for the community to reconnect with schools.

“Right now you have grandparents standing at the fence looking in at this [school] garden. They have so much to offer. Many of them are from a farming background; they have some techniques that the teachers and students can learn from.” Janice Pezzoli, Garden Coordinator, Bayside Community Center.

“Another big benefit of this garden is to allow the kids to learn community engagement and gain confidence from interacting with the community. Similarly, the community will have the chance to interact with our students. Maybe they will grow confident and be willing to hire our kids – to understand them.” Heather Dierolf, Principal, Springall Academy

Leadership is key. All of the projects have had committed and inspired leadership at multiple levels. With a sustainability plan in place at each location, leadership should continue to carry these projects forward. Locating funding for a garden coordinator at each site may help sustain this effort. While volunteers are a critical component to the sustainability of these gardens, managing a school-community garden is a time intensive proposition, and a funded, part-time coordinator may provide a critical piece that will allow the time of volunteers to be maximized and leveraged in a sustainable way.

LOOKING FORWARD

All four projects are still “works in progress.” Further evaluation could document and provide information about:

- Sustainability. How do these partnerships and their gardens grow, evolve, and endure? Has the initial support for the planning process left a foundation that flourishes? What are the essential characteristics of the partnerships that endure?
- How does leadership evolve?
- Do the early steps to invite community participation evolve into broader participation?
- How are liability concerns ultimately addressed?
- Does the vision for the San Diego School District to expand the pilot projects to other schools become a reality and what does it take to make that happen?
- Do these four initial projects inspire other school-community gardens beyond district boundaries? A network analysis could prove instructive.
- How does policy change carry forward into the future? Do more comprehensive policy changes occur once institutions accumulate some experience and comfort?
- How does integration of gardens into school criteria unfold and what benefits are realized?
- How do gardens benefit special needs students?
- What financial sources are developed to support this work and do partnerships successfully coordinate the resources they are able to develop? Do sustainable funding streams develop?
- What benefits are realized from the reintegration of communities into schools? Do schools enjoy broader support from the community on non-garden related issues?
- How does the availability of fresh produce through gardening improve access to community members and to students and families?

Building the evidence base through evaluation can directly support the sustainability of these projects, providing data to sustain and build internal and external support within partner agencies, institutions and the community. It could lead to funding opportunities, as well, as funders universally appreciate objectively documented success through evaluation. Finally, documentation of the ongoing successes and challenges of these projects will serve as a model for other communities and school districts, particularly as they weigh the benefits of entering into such partnerships and dealing with liability concerns.

